

Peru – Frequently Asked Questions

FAQ's Customs, Traditions

Etiquette

Peruvians invariably exchange a *Buenos Dias* (good morning) or *Buenos Tardes* (good afternoon).

Whistling can be a form of greeting in the North and other parts of Peru so women should not mistake it for harassment

Machismo is a part o Peruvian culture. Men will often direct conversation only toward other men. Women handle this situation by directing conversation at both the men and women alike.

Women should wear pants or a skirt that is longer than knee length.

Men should avoid shorts or casual T-shirts.

Women travelers over the age of 20 will be asked repeatedly whether or not they are married or have children.

SPACE - Peruvians have a different sense of space and it may feel they are pressing in on visitors. This is because they live in extended families, often with many family members sleeping in one room. They are accustomed to being up close and personal. Do not take this as an affront.

PACE - Everything moves slower in Peru. You may have to spend longer than anticipated waiting for food in a restaurant...and then wait still longer again for the bill. It is best to sit back and relax and not try to hurry things up...it won't work anyway.

Panhandling – whether or not to give money to those asking for it on the street is a personal decision. Remember that when you give them money you are encouraging the practice in the future. Know too, that families often have their children working as teams to collect money in the street. Instead of money, well prepared travelers will give pens, notebooks or other useful items.

HEALTH - While there are no required vaccinations, and the areas in which we travel are not prone to disease, always check with Centers for Disease Control (CDC) 877-394-8747 www.cdc.gov/travel for up to date information.

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ALTITUDE SICKNESS – The most common symptom of altitude sickness is feeling a little more tired and having to move slower. Resting the first day is a good remedy – do nothing strenuous, maybe just lie around and allow your body to adjust. Some people have more severe symptoms.

See our article on [Altitude Sickness](#). Consult your physician to verify your health is good for high altitude travel. There are medicines a physician can prescribe and this may be ideal for you. Ginseng and other herbs that oxygenate the blood are considered to be great as well. See a physician, herbologist or naturopath for the best method for you.

Traveler's Diarrhea – To avoid this, think carefully about everything you drink and eat.

Bottled water is king but plastic bottles are a nightmare in Peru (and everywhere else too!). Peru has no recycling or a system for hauling away trash so these plastics are clogging up the rivers and landfill...not good. It is best to travel with a refillable bottle and have the hotel fill it with their purified water each morning.

When you order a drink, order it WITHOUT ice. While the water is purified, the ice is usually not. Ask if the ice is made from purified water if you must have it...sometimes it is. If drinking out of bottles or cans, wipe the edges before drinking, or carry straws.

Avoid street vendors and buffets served under the hot sun.

Choose restaurants that come well recommended for taking precautions for foreigners. I usually chose the top end places.

Wash your hands before and after eating. Soap is not always available and it's a good idea to carry a hand sanitizer.

Eat fruits and vegetables from the market that can be peeled.

Eat salads and raw vegetables with extreme caution (confirm beforehand that they have been soaked in a chlorine solution).

Hot Foods are best...soups are great.

Avoid all types of shellfish. Cerviche is an exception - from a reputable restaurant.

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Before dumping cream into your coffee check that it has been pasteurized.

Only eat ice cream from top manufacturers like D’Onofrio, but avoid it if it is partially melted.

Strawberries, mushrooms, lettuce and tomatoes from the markets are probably not a good choice as they grow close to the ground and could be infected.

Mosquitoes and other biters can be around sometimes...mostly at dawn and dusk. Take precautions by wearing long pants and shirt sleeves with repellent if you are out and about during these times.

PACKING – Bring lightweight scrunch able clothing that allows you to dress in layers; light layers – it will not be cold when we are visiting Peru, maybe slightly cool in the mornings and evenings...a lightweight fleece works well. See our [article on how to pack](#) for the journey.

Money – Forget travelers checks, no one takes them...only the biggest hotels. Banks charge a hefty tariff to cash them and the lines are long. ATMs are everywhere, and although your home bank will charge around \$3 per withdrawal, this is probably the safest and best bet.

Notify your credit card companies that you will be travelling; otherwise you run the risk of being shut down on the plastic.

Rely on the ATM, Bring a couple travelers checks to tuck away in case you lose you ATM card. ATM’s are usually in glass rooms. They accept cards with Visa/Plus logo more commonly than those with MasterCard/Cirrus, though many machines accept everything.

Banco de Credito and Global Net are the *only machines that accept American Express Cards*. Global Net is the only machine that charges a commission to withdraw money. Other ATM’s let you off scot free! CAUTION...many machines don’t beep to remind you to take your card back (I lost one this way)...so remember to take it out of the machine.

Credit cards are good – although some places may charge a small fee if you use them. Outside of Lima, credit cards are not as widely accepted – and will mostly be accepted at big hotels and restaurants. VISA is the best card to have in Peru.

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Make Copies of all the credit and ATM cards you are taking, so you have all the information you will need in the event the items are lost; including the numbers to call if needed. Enter on your phone, or a sheet of paper you keep in a separate place; or email it to yourself.

Passport – make a photocopy of your passport in the event it is lost there will be a way to track it.

Peruvian currency is in Soles. As of July 6, 2010 the conversion is

1 American Dollar = 2.8250 soles

One year ago:

1 American Dollar = 3.25 soles

Go to www.xe.com to check for current conversion rates.

BARGAINING – this is a common practice nearly everywhere in Peru; especially at markets, hotels and shops. Have a good sense of what an item is worth beforehand...ask how much it costs (Cuanto cuesta?) and then offer 20-50 percent less depending on how outlandish the asking price is. Buyer and seller will come to terms somewhere in the middle.

TIPPING – Tipping is a great way for foreigners to get money to the people who need it most, waiters, hotel staff, drivers, porters, guides, burro drivers and other front line workers in the tourist industry. Tipping is not required and often not expected; yet even the smallest tip is greatly appreciated.

Tipping is an ethic that varies from person to person...here are some suggestions:

In restaurants we leave a tip of 10 percent even though most Peruvians leave a 1-sole coin at inexpensive restaurants and just a few soles more at fancier places. We think a tip is a good idea even if the restaurant is charging you 10 percent for service (which the waitperson never sees). Try to give the tip to the waitperson directly, especially if the restaurant is out of doors.

Give a few soles to anyone who helps you carry your bags including hotel staff or an airport shuttle driver...assuming you were pleased with their service.

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You should tip guides, porters and mule drives at least one day's wage for every week worked. If we stay at a hotel for more than a few days a tip to the receptionist, doorkeeper and other employees that made our stay enjoyable – is a good idea.

PHOTOGRAPHS – There are many people and children who will pose for pictures for money.....this is an entire profession complete with baby lambs and such. Markets, parades and street scenes are wonderful – bring your digital and check out Tribal Eye Images (www.tribaleye.co.uk) for some tips on capturing great photos.

SHIPPING PACKAGES HOME – risky business with the postal service...probably won't arrive. Use DHL or other service (very expensive but your package will arrive).

TELEPHONE – Phone cards are the best bet for calling home...the most popular is the 147 phone card. Dialing the US is about .80 per minute and local calls are .15 per minute. Surcharges apply to calls made from pay phones, so use your hotel phone or walk to any small store in Peru with the green and blue phone symbol above it.

Net to net phone calls are around .17 per minute to the US or Europe.

Cell phone rentals are available at the airport if you have people at home who want to be able to reach you.

Bringing your own cell phone might work, but service may be spotty in outlying areas. Check with your service provider...it's expensive, but convenient.

Skype can be installed on your cell phone...I have used it successfully in Cuzco to call direct from my cell to home.

INTERNET ACCESS – Available everywhere and the cheapest and most convenient way to communicate in Peru. Most hotels have wireless, and there are very inexpensive internet cafes about. One of those small travel computers beams you into wireless in most hotels and you can handle your emails in the comfort of your own room.

ELECTRICITY – the electric system in Peru is 220V and 60 cycles. Ours in US is 110 so a converter is needed in some situations. Some hotels have

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the 110 outlets in place. These converters are inexpensive in Peru if you forget to bring one along.

TIME ZONES – Peru runs on the same time as New York, Miami and the East Coast. There is no daylight savings time.

LANGUAGE – Learn a few words...English is well spoken just about everywhere but it's nice to be able to say a few words to people in their native language too. There are those [little electronic pocket translators](#) that can be helpful.

AIR TRAVEL – I usually build my immune system before travelling with 20,000 units of vitamin D a day for about two weeks in advance. There are other ways to build your immune system – check into it. The air in flight cabins is stale and germs freely circulate. While I used to think those little masks were overkill, I now plan to get one and use it. My last short flight to San Diego produced a bad virus.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS – check with the airlines on this. My last information was to pack them in checkable luggage. Make sure you have the scripts or information in the event they have to be replaced due to loss.

GET IN SHAPE – YOU WILL BE HAPPY YOU DID! This can be easily accomplished by walking each day, a little further than the previous day. Walking is a big part of the journey and you will want to do plenty of it to see the sacred sites, cities and other places.

You don't need to be an athlete, but will probably benefit greatly from being able to easily walk a few miles without a problem. We are not going anywhere will this will be "required" – navigation of the sites is generally easy.

SHOES – Most important! You will be walking and navigating stones and uneven surfaces. A shoe with great support and grip is essential....something really comfortable. [Ecco, Merrill or similar sandals](#) are divine...but after about three miles, the support does not feel great. I bring the sandals which work fine for most outings...and a [Merrill walking shoe](#) for the longer treks. This is all the shoeage you will require.

Walking Sticks – I recommend and use collapsible **Trek Ultra Lite** walking sticks to maintain balance and support over the uneven terrain at the sacred

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sites. They have saved my life many times. People hobbling along at Machu Picchu told me how envious they were of my walking sticks. There are no handrails and plenty of steps and awkward transitions. There are other brands of [walking sticks available](#)...check it out.

MEALS – Breakfasts are provided on this journey, and are often cooked to order – always delicious. We provide two dinners, first night and last night for the group. The other meals are left open for you to explore, meet locals and other travelers and sample the taste treats, sounds and sights of Peru.

We have found that when we include all meals, we may be taken to restaurants providing tourist quality food, with menu items that are repetitive, and other tour groups. We have found this to be boring and unsatisfactory – especially for the vegetarians in the group; and certainly for the gourmet minded.

We can suggest restaurants in each area we visit. Here is some general information and a few examples of restaurants in Peru.

Barbecuing Peruvian-Style: The Peruvian version of a barbecue get-together is called a *pachamanca*; it's basically cooking meat and veggies over coals or hot stones in a hole in the ground. On weekends in the countryside, mostly in the mountains, you'll see families gathered around smoky subterranean grills, cooking up pork or beef and potatoes and vegetables. (You can also get *pachamanca*-style dishes in some traditional restaurants.)

Chugging Chicha: An ancient Andean tradition is the brewing of *chicha*, beer made from fermented maize. You can find it at a few traditional restaurants, but for an authentic Andean experience, the best place to get it is at a simple bar or home that flies the *chicha* flag -- a long pole with a red flag or, often, balloon -- which is the local way of advertising that there's home-brewed *chicha* available inside. Served warm, in monstrous tumblers for a few pennies, it's not to many foreigners' liking, but it's one of the best ways to go native. *Chicha morada*, a refreshment made from blue corn, is something altogether different: It's sweet and nonalcoholic, and it actually tastes good (especially with ceviche).

Self-Medicating with *Mate de Coca*: Coca-leaf tea, a perfectly legal local drink that has been a tradition in the Andes for centuries, is a great way to deal with the high altitude of the mountains, which can make your head spin and your body reel. As soon as you hit Cusco or

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Puno, head straight for the *mate de coca* -- most hotels have it at the ready for their guests. And if that doesn't work, strap on the oxygen tank (many hotels supply that for their guests, too).

Slurping Ceviche: One of the classic dishes of Peruvian coastal cooking is ceviche -- raw fish and shellfish marinated in lime or lemon juice and hot chile peppers, and served with raw onion, sweet potato, and toasted corn. It's wonderfully refreshing and spicy. The best place to try one? A seaside *cevichería*, specializing in umpteen varieties of deliciously fresh ceviche.

Samples of Best Restaurants

Cicciolina, Cusco (tel. **084/239-510**): Cusco's restaurant scene is constantly improving, adding more upscale, fine-dining options, and this new restaurant, which serves stylish novo Andino cuisine, is the best example of the trend. You might think you've landed in a chic Tuscan country eatery, but the **menu is eclectic, with a soft spot for unusual spices**. The hopping bar is a smart haunt for pre-dinner drinks and a terrific selection of tapas, though the sexy, hushed dining room is the sleekest in Cusco.

MAP Café, Cusco (tel. **084/242-476**): Cusco's most chic and modern restaurant is tucked into the colonial patio of the city's great pre-Columbian art museum. It quietly makes a dramatic statement with its minimalist design: a glass and steel box. The food, **nouveau Andean**, is every bit as elegant and cleanly presented. With a super wine list and the opportunity to stroll through the museum after dinner, it's a perfect, sophisticated date restaurant.

Jack's Café Bar, Cusco (tel. **084/806-960**): The first place many gringos hit when they arrive in Cusco, and one they return to time and time again, is this amiable, informal cafe on the way up the hill to the San Blas district. It's a **great spot for any meal, a great deal, and perfect for bonding with fellow travelers** over a few drinks.

El Huacatay, Urubamba (Sacred Valley; tel. **084/201-790**): Most visitors to the Sacred Valley eat either at nondescript cafes or hotel restaurants. This new place is a welcome addition, **a chef-owned restaurant that's elegant and relaxed, serving very nice versions of Andean standards**. It's perfect for a long, lingering lunch in the garden or a more elegant dinner by candlelight in the small dining room. Refreshingly, it's a favorite of both gringos and (upscale) locals.

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Indio Feliz, Aguas Calientes (tel. **084/211-090**): The town at the bottom of Machu Picchu is a little scrappy, so this **Peruvian-French** restaurant really stands out. In an attractive and popular two-level dining room, it offers a great-value three-course menu. If by chance you just completed the 4-day Inca Trail trek, treat yourself to a meal here.

Sol de Mayo, Arequipa (tel. **054/254-148**): This is the best place in town for traditional Arequipeño cooking, which has quite a reputation in Peru. The setting, around a courtyard garden where strolling musicians play, is delightful. It's a perfect place to sink your teeth into local Peruvian specialties and is a great place to splurge.

La Trattoria del Monasterio, Arequipa (tel. **054/204-062**): A stylishly reserved restaurant carved out of the city's most distinguished walls, belonging to the Santa Catalina monastery, this laid-back Italian spot is a real find. With a menu designed by Peru's hottest chef, a nice wine list, a trio of quiet dining rooms, and accessible prices, it's a welcome change from noisier and more solicitous restaurants populating Arequipa's highly trafficked restaurant rows.

Zig Zag, Arequipa (tel. **054/206-020**): This chic and inviting restaurant has a unique specialty: stone-grilled ostrich. Healthier than other meats, ostrich is really good, as is another popular dish served here: alpaca (which is also healthier than red meat). In this two-level space with *sillar* walls and vaulted ceilings, the grilled meat is not the only thing that makes this a memorable dining experience.